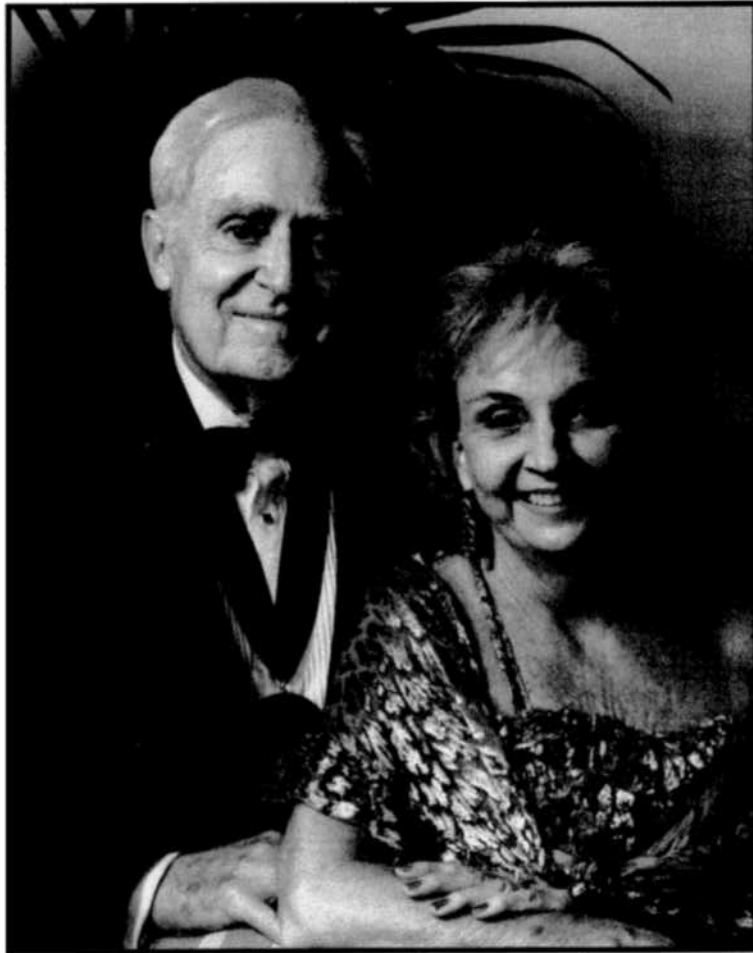

Eulogy for Thomas J. Whelan

by daughter, Sally Whelan



Dr. Whelan when president of the Pacific Coast Surgical Association and Mrs. Whelan.

My father was born and grew up in Lynn, Massachusetts as part of a large Irish Catholic family. It was and still is, a very strong and close family. He would be so happy to know that four members of that family made the journey from Boston to be with us, and with him today.

He was the only one of his brothers and sisters who chose to live a life far away from the circle of love that family made. But over the years I came to see how much he held that family within, as a guide to all that he did. I see that everything my father became, all the accomplishments we have heard about in the remembrances today, spring straight from the qualities and values instilled in that family by my father's mother and father.

My father knew that much was expected of him. He knew that three family generations, since emigration from Ireland, had worked hard to find a place in America and thrive. He knew he was blessed

to be in a family that valued education, and that he should strive to excel academically, and achieve excellence in his work. But I think he also knew that, more than anything else, his parents expected him to be a good person – to move about the world, in any endeavor and in daily behavior, with integrity. He was very consistent in holding to his values. And those values were, in large part, about people—how you treat people, enjoying time with people, and respecting all kinds of people.

My father relished his work, and his beliefs permeated his practice of medicine. He believed that healthcare was a birthright, and that a lack of health insurance should never exclude anyone from the best of care. He loved seeing women enter medicine, and gave endless support and encouragement to his women medical students and residents. He had a vision of training physicians to serve in their own communities throughout the Pacific, especially in underserved

areas. Occasionally, we would meet his students and residents with whom he spent much time, and we would joke with them that they got the better part of his day. Maybe we should sign up if we wanted more time with him. Perhaps most importantly in his teaching he insisted that a physician be warm and compassionate with those who came into his or her care. As recently as a few weeks ago my father told me how wonderful his work had been – what could be better, he said, than being able to help people everyday in such a meaningful way. Untold numbers of those who came into his care were grateful for his medical talents and, equally, for his deep humanity.

My dad loved humor, but he was also a serious man. You could play, but life was not to play around with. A life was to be all you can be. Work was not an endeavor for bringing in wealth, or even primarily about success and acclaim. Work was doing what you love, giving it your best, and the rest would follow. Being a parent was not about going along with what all the other parents were doing or allowing, but holding fast to your values and imparting them to your children. Sometimes he met resistance, during our teen years, in certain of our life decisions that he did not understand or approve of, or in differences in values. What strikes me now about those times is that after the initial differences he had the bigness of character to be open. He once told a friend of mine that his children were his teachers. He said we forced him to stretch, we made him embrace things he never imagined he would and, in this way, we widened his world view. This was nice to hear, but I give him most of the credit. Because he, more than anyone I know, learned from his mistakes, took them to heart, and really did try harder the next time. Would that we could all say that about ourselves.

Over the years he stretched and mellowed. He retired, and remained very active tutoring, consulting, and lecturing. And then over three years ago he had a stroke that took way too much from him. Fast-moving conversations became confusing; he still was gregarious, but social gatherings could be hard; and activities he loved were no longer possible. The days could be long. Somehow, though, his sunny nature endured, as well as his ability to always

enjoy something. Short-term memory was hard for him, but throw him a story about the old days – about a championship ball team he played on in high school, or a play he made as first baseman at Yale – and his mind was at once bright and happy, recalling vivid details of an exciting game.

Memories sustained him; he would dip into them and come up smiling. Sometimes, after sitting poolside, he would come into the house and say to my mother, “We have such a great family. It really has been a very good life.” What a blessing to be able to sum it up that way. It was a very full life. He was a baseball player, an army general, a physician, a teacher, a husband of 55 years, and a father of six children. And yet with all this he was strikingly unpretentious. He was many things to many people. Some, but by no means all, of the people he touched are here today.

And now he is gone.

He never seemed afraid to die. He was humble about death, but thought it as natural as breathing. At the burial of my grandfather, Papa Gianascol, I sobbed as they lowered the casket. My father walked over to me, put his arm around me and said very tenderly, “Darling...all you can do is let go.”

Now, we are trying to let go of you, Dad. And...we are holding you with us forever.

We are gathered here to honor and remember you. You would love this gathering of the people you loved.

We are with you wherever you are, and we are going to miss you terribly.

We are very lucky to have had you in our lives. God bless you, Dad.



Dr. Whelan becomes a brigadier general: pinning the stars